

Self-Knowledge Seminar 2018.10.2

Attending: Giovanni, Giacomo, Fiona, Peter, Eduardo, Xintong, Sam, Paul, Crispin, Indrek, Sonia, Jonathan, Carrie

Reading: Carruthers chp.2

Presenting: Paul

1. Discussions about the formulation of sub-personal processing rules:

(1) One thinks that one is in mental state M → One is in mental state M.

(2) One thinks that one isn't in mental state M → One isn't in mental state M.

Crispin wonders how rule (1) and (2), which are sub-personal processing rules, could explain transparency, which is thesis about mental states at personal level. Who is doing the thinking in the antecedent? Presumably it is the mind-reading faculty that makes the transition. But why (1) and (2) would entail that transparency obtains at personal level? Furthermore, he points out that to run these rules we need one's second-order states to run the rules, which already assumes a subject of self-conception.

Peter wonders about what 'one' refers to in (1). In other words, if he were to replace 'one' with a variable 'x', should he replaces 'one' with 'x' in all three occurrences?

Giovanni tries to clarify why Carruthers has these two processing rules in his account. The general structure of his argument is this. We have this widespread Cartesian epistemology which calls for explanation. One explanation is that it is true. Another explanation is that we are simply wired in such a way. He argues that Cartesian epistemology cannot be true, for reasons he presents in 2.5, therefore, it must be we are so wired-up. These rules are supposed to be part of the explanation that we are wired in such a way to think authoritatively.

Carrie wonders about the output of these rules (when used to read others' minds). If the inputs are sensory states, do these rules deliver anything propositional?

Giovanni replies that what the rules delivered can be quite rich and he quotes

'We frequently just find ourselves with beliefs about what someone else is thinking, without awareness of the genesis of those beliefs (although, as consummate self interpreters, we can generally construct such a story after the fact). Or we just see someone as trying to do one thing, or deciding to do another.' (page 17 of the pdf)

Carrie: So if we see someone as deciding doing something then we have a visual state that the person is deciding...

Paul: But 'Seeing as' is a personal level event, mind-reading operates at sub-personal level.

Giovanni: The sub-personal mind-reading faculty is just collecting visual cues and etc.. Carruthers stresses that his view is compatible with the impossibility of self-blindness. Giovanni wonders whether these rules are merely recommending (tipping) the answer or mandate the answer.

Paul: these rules are un-reflective rules, but on point of reflection we might think what these rules delivered are wrong.

2. Discussions about 'the inference to best explanation' argument for rule (1) and (2).

Peter does not think the explanandum is a fact. Peter quotes: 'How should we explain the fact that broadly Cartesian accounts of self-knowledge have been very widely endorsed across time and place?'(p.33). But it is not clear that this is a *fact*.

Crispin: even if it is a fact, he does not see the structure of explanation with the three explanations Carruthers provides.

Sam: the explanandum seems to be a sociological one rather than a philosophical one.

Crispin replies that the explanandum is simply that folks have these beliefs about self-knowledge. But there are two different points to make, one is that self-knowledge appears to be non-interpretative, non-inferential. Another is that self-knowledge is superior to knowledge of others. Carruthers' arguments should be about the first point.

Giovanni asks what is Crispin's explanation for these folk-beliefs.

Crispin thinks the asymmetry between self-knowledge and other-knowledge consists in something along the following lines: if we think one thinks so and so, then the best evidence is to ask them whether he/she does think so and so. What is it about the mind that mandates such rule of evidence? This is a normative question. Of course, there should be further qualifications about the kinds of mental states involved.

Indrek observes that the three explanations Carruthers offers seem to be general points about philosophical methodology. Nothing in these explanations seems to particularly hinge on the subject matter here.

3. Discussions on reverse engineering and mind-reading faculty

Peter wonders how the mind-reading system can 'represent features of its own operations and its own access to the mental states of the agent' (p.3 of the HO). If the mindreading system is a functional component of a mind, not a mind, how can it be a model of how the mind works?

(I missed this exchange about self-representation)

Crispin asks why wouldn't we lose reliability at the sub-personal level, during the processes like (a) (b) (c)?

Paul: Carruthers' answer is that we are generally good at self-interpretation

Giovanni suggests the point here might be a Rylean one, namely, one has more available evidence about oneself and in that sense one is better at self-interpretation than interpreting others.

Crispin: in the case of interpreting other's mental lives based on their behaviour, we have the data, e.g., their behaviour, and then attribute mental states to them. But in the case of self-attribution, we can attribute beliefs to ourselves in advance of actions. I may tell myself via silent speech that I tend to do x, but it is unlikely that I come to know my own intention in that way. We come to know our intentions not through observation/interpretation.

Giovanni: shouldn't we think the 'mind-split' cases show that in cases like that, one's belief about one's own mental state is not based on anything?

Crispin: In principle, it is unclear what's the data/input are on the interpretative model.

Peter agrees and points out that whatever the input is, the input itself already seems to require some sort of interpretative works.